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# STUDIES

## in the Spirituality of Jesuits



**The Converting Jesuit**  
by  
**Donald L. Gelpi, S.J.**

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Published by the American Assistancy Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality,  
especially for American Jesuits working out their aggiornamento  
in the spirit of Vatican Council II

## THE AMERICAN ASSISTANCY SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

consists of a group of Jesuits from various provinces who are listed below. The members were appointed by the Fathers Provincial of the United States.

The Purpose of the Seminar is to study topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and to communicate the results to the members of the Assistancy. The hope is that this will lead to further discussion among all American Jesuits--in private, or in small groups, or in community meetings. All this is done in the spirit of Vatican Council II's recommendation to religious institutes to recapture the original charismatic inspiration of their founders and to adapt it to the changed circumstances of modern times. The members of the Seminar welcome reactions or comments in regard to the topics they publish.

To achieve these purposes, especially amid today's pluralistic cultures, the Seminar must focus its direct attention sharply, frankly, and specifically on the problems, interests, and opportunities of the Jesuits of the United States. However, many of these interests are common also to Jesuits of other regions, or to other priests, religious men or women, or to lay men or women. Hence the Studies of the Seminar, while meant especially for American Jesuits, are not exclusively for them. Others who may find them helpful are cordially welcome to read them.

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# THE CONVERTING JESUIT

by

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. The Challenge of the Past Three General Congregations

Prior to Vatican II religious life in the Catholic Church had under the pressure of canonical legalism succumbed to a certain amount of monastic uniformity. The council, however, challenged contemporary religious to a healthy pluralism and prescribed a twofold strategy for diversifying vowed living. First, the council fathers summoned each order and congregation both to return to the Christian sources of vowed living and to rediscover its special identity as a community through a renewed understanding of the vision of its founder. Second, Vatican II called for the prudent adaptation of different religious institutes to the changed conditions of life in the modern world.<sup>1</sup>

Pedro Arrupe will, I believe, go down in history as one of the great generals of the Society for a variety of reasons, but high among his achievements ranks his willingness as superior general to allow contemporary Jesuits to redefine together their sense of apostolic purpose. Our last three general congregations have committed us as an order to pursue through every apostolate we undertake practical dedication to the ideals of faith and justice, not only in our own lives and in the lives of the individuals we serve, but also in trying to influence the institutions that structure contemporary human society.

The Thirty-first General Congregation calls Jesuits to live a socially conscious poverty in a world filled with wounded and despoiled people. It summons us to identify with the poor, and it reconsecrates the Society to the social apostolate as one of its major pastoral endeavors. While sanctioning the apostolates of those who labor directly among the poor, General Congregation XXXI exhorts Jesuits to confront global inequities as well. It cites

three kinds of such inequity: between sectors of economic life, between regions within a nation, and between nations and classes of nations. The congregation condemns specific consequences of institutionalized injustice: malnutrition, illiteracy, underemployment, and overpopulation. It warns against acquiescing in obfuscating ideologies or reacting to injustice out of mindless passion. It challenges Jesuits to bring a Christian vision to the search for justice and to collaborate in constructing a social order that incarnates justice, truth, and responsible freedom.<sup>2</sup>

The Thirty-second General Congregation develops these insights even further. It links the spread of atheism to the prevalence of institutionalized injustice and insists that we can never separate authentic faith in God and the pursuit of social justice. Indeed, General Congregation XXXII places the service of faith and promotion of justice at the heart of every Jesuit apostolate. It decries the poverty of millions as a gross violation of distributive justice. It demands that Jesuits attack the entwined roots of unbelief and injustice by summoning unbelievers and oppressors to authentic faith in Christ. The congregation consecrates the Society to a systematic study of the personal and social causes of injustice. It challenges Jesuits to identify with the poor, to work for them, and to learn from them. It urges Jesuits to engage in a "conscientizing" apostolate, to preach in poverty, to live a poverty sensitized to the fact of mass starvation and hunger.<sup>3</sup>

The Thirty-third General Congregation can point to the restoration of normal government to the Society as its most significant achievement, but it can cite its confirmation of the two preceding congregations as its second most important accomplishment. General Congregation XXXIII calls Jesuits to face the crying needs of the times. It names new urgencies: the spiritual hunger of millions, especially of youth; gross violations of human rights; the plight of refugees; racial and sexual discrimination and exploitation; the murder of the unborn and the neglect of the aged; the poverty and oppression of whole masses of people. Moreover the documents of this congregation insist yet again that the authentic practice of faith and the pursuit of justice must in the concrete mutually interpenetrate one another.<sup>4</sup>

## B. The Debate over the Challenge

In obedience to Pope John Paul II, contemporary Jesuits need to dedicate themselves anew to the full implementation of all the decrees of Vatican II. Anyone, however, who reads the decrees both of Vatican II and of our last three general congregations must conclude that our Jesuit documents dedicate us in a special way to realize the vision of *Gaudium et spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

Not everyone has greeted these revolutionary developments in Jesuit spirituality with enthusiasm. Some argue that the attempt to link the proclamation of faith to the pursuit of justice blurs the distinction between the sacred and the secular, that it involves Jesuits in unseemly ways in economics, politics, and other worldly pursuits. Others object that concern for this-worldly justice obscures the eschatological nature of the Society's mission. The latter contend that Jesuits should concern themselves with the eternal salvation of their own and of other people's souls, not with the economic and political structures of secular society.

Those who defend the last three general congregations against such attacks cite the moral consequences of Christian discipleship. They argue that commitment to Jesus Christ in faith constrains all who perpetuate his mission in the power of his Spirit, Jesuits included, to summon not just individuals but social institutions to repentant fidelity to gospel living. If that summons blurs the distinction between the sacred and the secular, so be it. The blurring began with Jesus. Defenders of our updated spirituality argue as well that Christians cannot divorce the care of human souls from concern for human bodily needs, and they contend that in contemporary society such concern forces one to confront and to oppose institutional as well as personal injustice.

Who has the right of it in this vexed debate? Have we as a religious order sold our spiritual birthright for a mess of political pottage? A host of conflicting issues underlie the contemporary argument, which ranges far beyond in-house discussions among us Jesuits concerning the scope of our vocation. The quarrel brings to the surface within the Church conflicting interpretations of the human condition, of human nature, of the Church itself, of priesthood, and of ministry. Most of these issues lie beyond the scope of this essay, but I myself have come to believe that a contemporary theology of conversion has some light to shed on the ongoing

discussion of the scope of our pastoral responsibilities and apostolic mission.<sup>5</sup>

In contemporary theological parlance, the term "conversion" has acquired somewhat broader connotations than it has traditionally enjoyed. All conversion, of course, involves a turning from and a turning to; but in the past, apologetic argument combined with interdenominational competition to give "conversion" a specific and rather narrow meaning. Converts were seen as turning from either heresy or unbelief to embrace the one, true Church. Christian conversion, to be sure, must always culminate in an ecclesial commitment to a worshiping, eucharistic community; but in the theology of conversion which I have over the past ten years been attempting to develop, I use the term "conversion" more broadly to mean the decision to assume responsibility for a distinguishable area of experienced growth and development. Converts turn from irresponsible to responsible living. Accordingly, in addition to religious conversion I speak of affective, intellectual, moral, and socio-political conversion. Moreover, in this broader and more nuanced understanding of conversion, one can, I believe, show that socio-political conversion secures and guarantees the full authenticity of the other forms of conversion.

## II. STATEMENT OF THESIS AND PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

In the course of this essay I would, then, like to argue the following thesis. *As Religious we are called to integrally converted lives; but unless we are willing to advance beyond mere personal conversion to socio-political conversion, we must as Christians and as Jesuits inevitably succumb to inauthenticity in our personal relationship with God and with one another.*

Since my thesis employs a language of conversion that some may find unfamiliar, perhaps a preliminary definition of terms may help clarify somewhat some of its implications.

### A. Conversion Defined

By "conversion" I mean the double decision to repudiate irresponsible behavior and to take responsibility for the subsequent development of some



aspect of my own experience. "Responsibility" means accountability. Responsible people measure the motives and consequences of their actions against norms and ideals they recognize as personally binding. They also recognize that they must answer to others for the motives and consequences of their decisions.

#### B. Religious Conversion and Christian Conversion Defined

Religious converts respond most immediately to God; but that response also changes the way they respond to their fellow human beings. One can respond to the historical self-revelation and self-communication of God only in one way: on the terms set by God himself. Such a response expresses religious faith. The Christian convert responds in faith to the definitive, unique, and religiously normative self-disclosure and self-communication of God accomplished by the incarnation of the divine Word and by the eschatological mission of his Spirit. Both events inaugurate the eschaton, the end of time, the last age of salvation, because they communicate the reality of God with an incarnational fullness that goes beyond every other historical act of divine self-revelation.

#### C. Affective, Intellectual, and Moral Conversion Defined

But we cannot confine responsible behavior to religious living only. Even if we consult exclusively our own personal experience, we may identify three other distinct realms of potentially responsible behavior. We can cultivate emotional responsibility, intellectual responsibility, and moral responsibility. We cultivate emotional responsibility by developing healthy affective attitudes and by trying to develop balanced esthetic sensibilities. We cultivate intellectual responsibility when in our search for truth we submit to the constraints of sound logic. We cultivate moral responsibility when we conform our decisions to ethically sound principles and cultivate a virtuous character. I call the decision to act responsibly in each of these areas of experience affective, intellectual, and moral conversion.

#### D. Personal Conversion and Socio-Political Conversion Defined

Religious, affective, intellectual, and moral conversion all have this in common: In each of these forms of conversion I assume responsibility for my own decisions. I therefore call these four forms of conversion

"personal," since they look primarily to the convert's own personal options. Conversion, however, begins to take on a socio-political dimension when the convert takes responsibility "within the gamut of realistic possibility" for influencing the motives and consequences of the decisions of others, especially of those whose choices shape the institutional structures of society.

#### E. Authenticity and Inauthenticity Defined

The fact that conversion can assume five different forms means that any given individual may have undergone one form of conversion without necessarily experiencing the other kinds. Nor need one pass from one form of conversion to another in any fixed serial order. In other words, I may be committed to acting responsibly in one realm of my experience without necessarily committing myself to act responsibly in another. When that occurs, the convert's behavior manifests inauthenticity. By "inauthenticity" I mean the human propensity to act irresponsibly despite one's professed intention to do the opposite.

These definitions should cast some light on the thesis I hope to argue in the pages which follow. I am suggesting that as religious we are called by God to responsible living at both a personal and a socio-political level. Integral conversion, therefore, demands a commitment to responsible living in five areas of human experience: affectivity, thinking, moral decision making, religion, and institutionalized living. I hope to show that the very effort to live responsibly in one's interpersonal dealings with others must with moral inevitability fail in some significant measure unless one simultaneously attempts to ensure the responsibility of the decisions that shape human institutional living. In other words, only socio-political conversion can ensure the complete authenticity of personal conversion.

#### F. Initial and Ongoing Conversion Defined

A few other preliminary definitions may facilitate a clearer understanding of the reflections that follow. Every speculative approach to conversion needs to respect the variety and diversity of human experience. In that context one needs to distinguish between initial and ongoing conversion. In initial conversion the convert passes from irresponsible to responsible behavior in some area of experience. In ongoing conversion,

converts attempt to deal with the practical consequences of their decision for responsible living. One may, for example, decide in an initial affective conversion that the time has come to deal systematically and responsibly with one's emotional hangups; but one still confronts the more or less arduous task of doing so with the support and direction of others.

#### G. Natural Conversion Defined

Moreover, as we have seen, religious conversion must, if it hopes to advance responsibly, express faith in the gracious intervention of God in human history. One may, however, decide for responsible living affectively, intellectually, morally, or socio-politically in complete abstraction from the gracious intervention of God in human history. I call all such decisions naturally good, because, while they express responsible attitudes and habits of acting, they remain untouched by supernatural faith.

#### H. The Dynamics of Conversion Defined

We have, then, distinguished five moments within the total conversion process. Each moment exemplifies a distinct kind of conversion. A theology of conversion must deal, however, not only with the diversity of converted living; it must also deal with the dynamics of conversion. By the dynamics of conversion I mean the ways in which the different forms of conversion affect and mutually condition one another.

#### I. The Argument Outlined

I propose, then, the following strategy for arguing my thesis. Let us first try to understand the kinds of experiences that color each of the different kinds of human conversion. Then we shall explore the dynamics of an integral five-fold conversion. In the process I hope to show that the attempt to confine converted living to concern with personal decisions or interpersonal relationships alone inevitably suffuses both with a subversive irresponsibility.

In the discussion which follows, I have taken the liberty of illustrating both the forms and dynamics of conversion, largely from my own personal experience. I hope that an autobiographical approach to conversion will offend no one. I have adopted such an approach for three reasons: (1) While I do not underestimate my own capacity for self-deception, I feel that I

can speak with more authority about my own religious experience than I can about the religious experiences of others. (2) I also believe that sharing our own stories and personal journeys of faith can foster in significant ways union of hearts and minds among us Jesuits. (3) Finally, as a teacher interested in the theology of conversion, I have found that I can most effectively invite others to reflect on their own experience of conversion, or the lack of it, by sharing with them my own experience of both. If, nevertheless, the autobiographical material contained in the pages that follow appears needlessly egocentric, I can only beg my readers' pardon and ask them to ascribe the defect to my own manifest lack of conversion.

One word of caution before we begin. The following argument divides into three parts. First (in section III) I attempt to describe concretely the five kinds of conversion. Second (in section IV) I dwell at some length on the dynamics of personal conversion. Third (in section V) I explore the interplay between personal and socio-political conversion. In this third and final part of the argument I attempt to prove two things: (1) Personal conversion authenticates socio-political by providing the norms for dealing with injustice, (2) Socio-political conversion authenticates personal conversion by deprivatizing it.

My approach to conversion differs, then, from many other short essays on the subject in that it attempts to deal with the conversion process as a whole. Often short essays about conversion deal in some depth with one or other facet of conversion or at most compare the ways in which one form of conversion affects another. I, however, am asking the reader to ambition more: for we cannot come to a fully adequate insight into the exigencies of converted living until we grasp how one kind of conversion conditions all the other four forms of conversion and is in turn conditioned by them.

I like to imagine a good theological argument as a successful juggling act. One has to keep all the elements of the argument in constant and simultaneous interplay, the way a good juggler keeps lots of balls in constant motion. Drop one element and the argument fails through inadequacy. In section III of this essay I attempt to juggle four balls simultaneously, namely, the four forms of personal conversion. Then I add a fifth, socio-political conversion. I will try to argue clearly and concretely. I do, however, invite the reader to approach an analysis of conversion with an

openness to and an awareness of its complexity. For the complexity of the analysis mirrors the complexity of life itself.

### III. FIVE EXPERIENCES OF CONVERSION

#### A. Four Forms of Personal Conversion

I myself was born and raised a Catholic in that most Catholic of southern cities, New Orleans. I had believed in Christ from childhood on, but I believe I underwent what I would call an adult conversion to Christ when I decided to become a Jesuit. I had not planned things that way. My own scenario for living included a wife, a family, and a medical career in the tradition of the Gelpi family. I fought the call to the Society for months of futile wrestling with God, then like Jacob finally gave up in exhaustion and applied to the novitiate. In the years that lay ahead I would have to keep learning that lesson over and over: One serves God finally on His terms, not on one's own. With the decision to enter the novitiate, however, I believe I took decisive adult responsibility for the way I would henceforth live my life as a Christian; and I look back on that decision as my religious coming of age, as an initial adult conversion to Christ.

As a Jesuit priest I have had to deal with people whose religious conversion, unlike mine, involved a passage from unbelief to belief. In my own case, adult religious conversion felt cut from the same cloth as the rest of my life, although it redirected me along a path I would not have personally chosen. Those who encounter Christ out of an experience of unbelief seem to sense more of a sea-change in their lives. They talk less about continuity with the past and more about being engulfed in the living water of God. They speak about their complete rebirth and introduction into a new creation.

My academic training in the Society has, I believe, in the course of the years nurtured me to some measure of intellectual conversion. I find this moment harder to date. But if I had to, I would look to a day in my third year of philosophy when I decided that I could not accept my professor's position on the reality of relationships. Subsequent to that decision, I began to take responsibility for my own thoughts in a new way.

I began trying to clarify my own ideas on paper, even to publish.

No Jesuit can live through the novitiate, the long retreat, ongoing spiritual direction, and the annual eight-day retreat without dealing in some way with personal affectivity. In my own case, however, I do not think that I began to face my emotional hangups systematically until the end of theology. I had studied theology for the first two years at Collège St. Albert in Louvain, Belgium. There culture shock and immersion in an alien, debilitating, and personally unacceptable approach to religious life finally broke down my ego defenses. I began with struggle and pain to face my own capacity for rage, and with that a host of other distasteful emotions that I had been keeping under wraps. That affective conversion deepened as I advanced through my mid-life crisis.

Moral conversion came much earlier. I was born in 1934. No white boy could grow up in the New Orleans of my childhood without breathing racism in through his pores. I went to Mass in a segregated church and saw no anomaly in the practice. My own family included no violent racists; but racist attitudes pervaded the world from which I drew my life. In all kinds of subtle ways it poisoned my conscience.

The Jesuits who taught me in high school mounted successive onslaughts on the racist consciences of all their students. I resisted them tooth and nail at first; but gradually I realized the cogency of what they said. In renouncing my own personal racism I was forced with anguish and shame to distance myself for the first time from the moral code of the society that had engendered and nurtured me. I look back to that wrenching decision as the beginning of my moral conversion.

#### B. Socio-Political Conversion

For several years I was content to deal with my own personal racism; but as a regent I also began to espouse the fight against racism as a cause. At that moment I believe that I advanced initially beyond a personal to a socio-political conversion. As we have seen, an adequate construct of conversion recognizes the presence within the total conversion process of five, not just four, moments or kinds of conversion. So far we have focused on the four moments that constitute personal conversion. The personally converted take responsibility for their own subsequent decisions in some area of their own experience. They may even try to influence others at an

interpersonal level. The socio-politically converted, by contrast, acknowledge in addition their responsibility to influence the decisions of others, especially those that shape the large, impersonal social structures that mold our attitudes, beliefs, consciences, and relationship to God.

These two social realms--that of the intimate and interpersonal on the one hand and that of the massive and impersonal on the other--display describable traits that dramatize their real distinction. In interpersonal relationships, individuals wear faces; they see and deal with one another directly. In impersonal, institutionalized relationships, by contrast, individuals rarely see face to face those whose decisions shape their lives and vice versa. In interpersonal relationships, responsibility has a name; our friends and relatives make specific claims on us as we on them. In large institutions many individuals share the responsibility for decision making; as a consequence, one is harder pressed to assign praise or blame. Interpersonal relationships yield immediate pain or immediate satisfaction; the way our friends, family, and fellow religious treat us results in immediate joy or suffering. In impersonal institutional structures, however, both punishment and satisfaction are postponed; and that fact creates the greater possibility and even likelihood that justice will be miscarried. Those who have merited the reward of their labors may never receive it; those who exploit others may hide behind anonymity and the law's delays. Interpersonal relationships can pose vexing challenges, but by and large we can manage them with greater ease than we can large, impersonal institutions. On the other hand, because large, impersonal institutions affect the lives of more people, the decisions taken in such a context often have greater consequences for good or ill than more manageable, interpersonal relationships.

As a small boy in New Orleans I discovered the inescapable, all-pervasive influence of the large, impersonal, racist institutions that shaped my own life and that of my family. For many years I resisted dealing with those influences even at a personal and interpersonal level. Once I decided to deal with them, I experienced an initial moral conversion; but until I decided to face the institutions themselves and begin to oppose their injustice, I had not yet undergone socio-political conversion.

Several events conspired to decide me to join publicly with those who opposed racial injustice. During my second year of novitiate, Father

William Crandall, then the provincial of the New Orleans Province, called a province assembly (in those days we called it a "duma") in order to formulate a clear province policy towards racism. Although most Jesuits in our province deplored and opposed racial injustice, a few had fallen victim to it and had preached and taught it publicly. As provincial, Father Crandall decided to meet head-on the problem of conflicting assessments of the morality of racism. He gathered the major superiors of the province together with some of our best philosophers and theologians to hammer out a statement on the immorality of racism and to formulate practical policies for dealing with racism in the institutions of the province. In three days of intense discussion and debate, the group reached complete unanimity. Nothing could have communicated to us novices more clearly and effectively how the Society expected us to respond to racism. As brothers in Christ we would stand together in this matter and summon not only one another, but also the bigoted secular society in which we ministered, to personal conversion and to institutional justice in dealings with blacks.

Although as a child I had played with some of the black children in the neighborhood, I had never really befriended them. While studying philosophy in St. Louis, I learned to number black Jesuits among my brothers and to enjoy the grace of their friendship. During that time the White Citizens Council had stepped up its activity in the South. I sensed as I approached regency that racial tensions would probably flare in whatever place I was assigned to teach.

I was in fact assigned to teach at Jesuit High School in New Orleans in 1958. The city was lurching toward desegregating schools and public facilities. Archbishop Rummel had confronted some of the leading Catholic racists in the city and would during my period of regency excommunicate those who refused to renounce racism. Some of them sent their children to Jesuit High. My own students divided fairly equally into segregationists and integrationists. No teacher in New Orleans at the time could avoid facing the issue of racism head-on. Not that I would have wanted to avoid it. I espoused the cause of integration wholeheartedly and was, I believe, able to help some of my segregationist students to revise their consciences.

At the time, the classroom and ballot box seemed to offer me the only effective forum for promoting the cause of racial justice. My own extreme introversion and detestation of conflict make political activism difficult

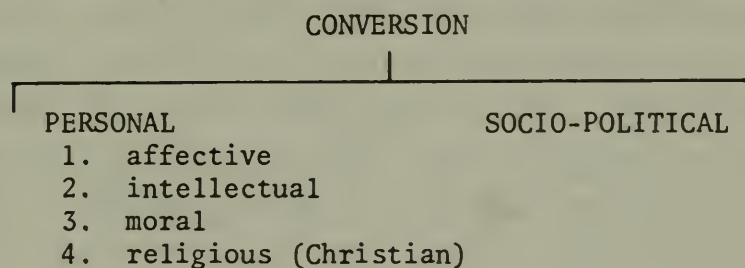


for me, but during the sixties I learned with others the political uses of public demonstrations. When the opportunity arose, I joined those who marched against racism and the Vietnamese war and did what I could to support conscientious objectors. In the early 1970's I learned in Berkeley to confront the ugly fact of sexism in myself, my country, and my Church. Involvement in Bread for the World has taught me more recently still the effectiveness of Christian lobbies for justice.

I know many people, Jesuits and non-Jesuits alike, far more politically active than myself. But I can find some evidence of socio-political conversion in my own life and in others whose piety makes time for some form of political activism.

I cite these moments of initial and ongoing conversion in my own life not because I regard myself in any way as a particularly exemplary model of conversion but simply to illustrate the kinds of experiences on which a theology of conversion attempts to reflect. I feel confident that those who read these words can cite analogous instances of personal and socio-political conversion in their own pilgrimage through life.

#### Diagram 1: The Forms of Conversion



#### IV. THE DYNAMICS OF PERSONAL CONVERSION

A theology of conversion tries to do more than merely identify five distinguishable, interrelated moments within an experience of integral, fivefold conversion. It also tries to throw light on the dynamics of conversion, on the ways in which the different forms of conversion mutually condition one another. An insight into those dynamics yields, moreover, important norms for diagnosing institutional injustice.

I discover five dynamics within personal conversion alone. Let me

state them dogmatically first and try to exemplify them from my personal experience and from the experiences of others. (1) Christian conversion mediates between affective and moral conversion. (2) Affective conversion animates intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. (3) Intellectual conversion informs affective, moral, and religious conversion. (4) Moral conversion helps orient affective, religious, and intellectual conversion to realities and values that make ultimate and absolute claims. (5) Religious conversion transvalues affective, intellectual, and moral conversion. Let us try to understand more concretely how each of these dynamics shapes an experience of personal conversion.

#### A. Christian Conversion Mediates between Affective and Moral Conversion

##### 1. The Dynamic Illustrated

I have with fits and starts experienced something of this dynamic in my own life, and I have observed it in the lives of others. When I completed doctoral studies in philosophy in 1970, I was assigned to teach at Loyola University in New Orleans. There I joined the charismatic prayer group which gathered in the second floor of the student center every Friday night. I was able to observe this particular dynamic of conversion at work in the lives of the young people with whom I prayed. Some of them had returned to the sacraments after a period of extreme alienation from the Church and from God. Not only had their conversion experience brought their anger and frustration with institutional religion to an initial healing, but their participation in shared charismatic prayer enabled them to read the Bible with new eyes. The figure of Jesus, the beauty of his life and vision, gripped their hearts.

After a year of praying together, a group of them decided that the Lord was calling them to form some kind of community on or near the campus which would by its life together attempt to give a more visible kind of Christian witness to their fellow students. They secured a house across the street from the university and moved in. They decided that they would have to pray their way to an understanding of how the Lord was calling them to live. They looked to the Spirit and written word of God to lead them in this matter. They concluded very quickly that a community of Christian witness could not allow itself to divide into haves and have-nots. As disciples of the Lord they must be willing not only to share whatever

they possessed with one another but also to welcome into their community the poor, the marginal, and the dispossessed; and they did both with disarming joy and spontaneity. They pooled their funds and welcomed beggars to share their table. Through faith and shared prayer they had come very quickly to insights which I myself had reached by a slower, more round-about process.

That process began in my novitiate. In my second year our novice master, Anthony Mangiaracina, made us read Alban Goodier's *A More Excellent Way*; and for a while personal friendship with Christ became the pious rage in Grand Coteau, Louisiana. At the same time a seed had been planted in my own heart that would one day bear fruit. I see myself during those years as a law-and-order Catholic and Jesuit, quite content with the fairly legalistic interpretation of the three vows of religion we had imbibed from *Miles Christi Jesu*, the stuffy commentary on the Jesuit rule which we studied in our cubicles. But eventually, by the grace of God, my legalistic spirituality collapsed, as indeed it deserved to do; and I was with considerable anguish forced to face the fact that I had lost whatever initial rationale I had had for living the religious life. Not that I doubted my vocation. I felt that God had called me to live as a Jesuit; but I had seen through the attempt to reduce poverty and obedience to passive dependence on superiors' permissions and chastity to the mere renunciation of sex. I knew there had to be more to the vows than that, and in my perplexity I turned to the New Testament to see what light it could throw on the positive meaning of vowed living. In the course of several years of prayer I began to rediscover some of the deeper implications not only of the vows but also of friendship with Jesus. I began to realize that such friendship means putting on his mind, learning to see the world with his eyes.

Moreover, in the teachings of Jesus as they are preserved in the New Testament I discovered a coherent moral vision, the same moral vision that would at a later date captivate my charismatic student friends in New Orleans. I found that Jesus spoke little about poverty but long about the willingness to share one's bread, one's material possessions, with others, especially with those in need. Such sharing should express trust in the Father's providential care of each of his children. It should imitate the gratuity with which he sends the good things of life to saint

and sinner alike. Christian sharing should reach across social barriers. It should welcome the sinner, the marginal, the outcast. I began to think of the vow of poverty as a particular strategy for bringing into existence such open, caring communities of faith.

The Jesus I encountered in the New Testament had nothing specific to say about celibacy (though he spoke of "eunuchs for the Kingdom") but much to say about the quality of love his disciples should have for one another. I began to see marriage and celibacy as two different ways of incarnating that love.

I also realized that the perfection of Jesus' obedience lay not in his fidelity to laws (which he broke on occasion) but in his unswerving sense of mission. I began to see the vow of obedience as a dynamic way of perpetuating in a ministering community the atoning service of Christ to a sinful world.<sup>6</sup>

I would like to live these ideals more perfectly than I do. Nevertheless, as I pondered Jesus' moral vision, I was struck by its historical and moral uniqueness and by its beauty. I realized that the vows of religion deserve to be called evangelical to the extent that they express a particular way of incarnating his mind. I realized too that Jesus exacted fidelity to his vision of the Kingdom not from an elite group of his disciples only but from *all* of them. All Christians are called to a life of gratuitous sharing, of atoning love, and of service. Religious are called to walk the path of discipleship in one way, married people in another; but all are called to put on the mind of Christ, to incarnate his vision of living as a child of God in his image.<sup>7</sup>

Christian conversion mediates between affective and moral conversion because it expresses a heartfelt, intuitive response to God incarnate that culminates in a commitment of faith to One whose moral teachings both lure and constrain the Christian conscience in specific ways.

## 2. The Dynamic Explained

Contemporary studies of the human psyche cast light on this complex process of human transformation. They suggest that we perceive reality in two ways: intuitively and logically. Intuitive thinking relies on feelings and images. It manifests greater spontaneity than controlled logical thinking. It grasps reality through judgments of feeling rather

than of inference. Esthetic judgments exemplify this way of understanding reality. The artist who decides that a work of art is now finished makes a judgment both about the art object and about the reality it attempts to communicate; but he cannot reduce that judgment to a syllogism. The work *feels* finished, that's all. Judgments of prudence and of discernment engage feeling and emotion in an analogous fashion. We must then distinguish two principles of judgment in human experience: one rational and logical, the other intuitive and affective.

But our emotions can blind us to reality as easily as they can disclose it to us. Both sympathetic affections (like love, friendship, compassion) and negative affections (like rage, fear, and guilt) reveal reality to us. We understand best the things we love; indeed, love itself, as the mystics know, understands in its own right. Similarly, we should fear things that threaten us, we should feel shame for our sins and selfishness, we should rage against injustice. When, however, we repress our negative feelings and refuse to face them consciously, they begin to distort our perceptions of reality in two ways. The more we repress negative emotions, the more they control conscious behavior in unconscious ways. They generate "nervousness," freeze the personality in compulsive tics, explode in violent, destructive, antisocial behavior, imprison one in psychotic fantasies, and ultimately drive the tormented soul into the isolated despair of suicide. Repressed negative feelings cause us, then, to overreact. They trick us into projecting unreal characteristics onto reality. Think, for example, of the way that paranoia peoples the world with non-existent, lurking enemies. Repressed negative feelings also motivate inflated forms of behavior. They fill the conscious psyche with illusory feelings of omnipotence and blind it to its finitude and real destructive potential.<sup>8</sup>

If we are to perceive reality truly with our hearts, we need to face unconscious negative feelings which isolate us from the real or which inspire inflated perceptions of ourselves and of our own importance. The affectively converted do precisely that. They open their emotional monster closets and face the repressed rage, fear, and guilt that distort their perceptions of reality. The healing of negative affections allows the sympathetic emotions greater scope to play. The imagination is freed not only to dream dreams of a better world but also to deal with life realistically.

In the process the heart is sensitized to beauty.

Christian conversion engages such esthetic sensibilities. The Christian convert responds spontaneously to the beauty of God incarnate in Jesus and in people who resemble him. Love of that beauty culminates in commitment, in the leap of faith that commits one to follow the Lord as his faithful disciple. Discipleship, however, demands that the convert live in the image of Jesus. It imposes very specific moral constraints. In other words, by focusing the affectively converted on the person of Jesus in a commitment of discipleship that transforms the way they live, Christian conversion mediates between affective and moral conversion.

#### B. Affective Conversion Seeks to Animate Intellectual, Moral, and Religious Conversion

As we have just seen, affective conversion brings repressed negative feelings to healing. In the process it frees the creative imagination both to dream dreams and to deal realistically and creatively with oneself and one's world. Affective conversion, then, animates the other forms of personal conversion. It fills them with imaginative zest and creativity in dealing with specific problems, and it inspires the human hopes that motivate intellectual, moral, and religious striving. Let us reflect more concretely on how this occurs.

##### 1. Affective Conversion Animates Intellectual

We undertake intellectual projects in the hope that they will lead us and others to a better insight into reality. In 1973 I joined the faculty of the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley in the hope that I could, through collaboration with theological colleagues, draw upon my own training in North American philosophy to begin to formulate an inculturated theology of conversion. After ten years of hard work I believe that I have laid a solid foundation for realizing that speculative dream. Similarly every teacher at the beginning of every school year dreams that his or her students will be deeper, better people by the end of the term. Every responsible scholar and scientist hopes the world will be better for long hours spent in library or laboratory.

The affectively converted not only dream dreams of intellectual achievement; they can also deal both realistically and creatively with

concrete intellectual problems. All rational thinking begins irrationally, in mind play. Logicians have never succeeded in telling scientists and scholars how to come up with the right answer to perplexing problems. Initially the human mind needs to dally with data, approach a problem from different perspectives, until finally with a creative leap of the imagination it cries "I have it" and hits upon an explanation that seems to make sense. Affectively converted people cultivate the kind of imaginative flexibility that frees the mind to tease the truth playfully from reality.

## 2. Affective Conversion Animates Moral

The morally converted also need the emotional flexibility and imaginative creativity which affective conversion instills in order to resolve thorny ethical dilemmas. The human conscience lives stretched between an ideal vision of human behavior and actual human conduct, between an ideal vision of social intercourse and the way people actually behave. Affective conversion inspires the hope that sustains moral commitment to sound ethical ideals despite the venality of some people; and it frees the conscience to devise imaginative ways of advancing situations marred by violence and injustice one step closer to justice and peace.

The recent bishops' pastoral *The Challenge of Peace* illustrates the kind of visionary but creatively realistic moral thinking of which I speak. Faced with the possibility of nuclear holocaust and with the immorality of nuclear weapons, the bishops nevertheless allowed a stringently qualified toleration of a policy of nuclear deterrence provided the superpowers begin to move effectively toward an arms freeze and the elimination of their nuclear arsenals. The bishops wrestled with a moral dilemma of international and cosmic proportions. One senses an analogous emotional health in those who resolve day-to-day ethical dilemmas with a similar combination of vision and tact.

## 3. Affective Conversion Animates Religious

Affective conversion also helps animate religious and Christian conversion. As we shall see, Christian faith creates a frame of reference which demands the re-evaluation of natural and sinful hopes and aspirations. The Christian convert re-evaluates both in the light of the historical self-revelation of God accomplished in Jesus and the Spirit. Fully authentic

Christian hope needs, however, to root itself in a healthy human heart freed from crippling neuroses and psychoses, capable of dreaming great dreams and of acting vigorously in the power of the Spirit to bear witness to and realize the kingdom of God on earth as in heaven. We know that Ignatius wanted the men of the Society to nurture great desires in their hearts and to ambition great things for Christ. By freeing the human heart to deal imaginatively and creatively with its world, affective conversion supplies human zest and realistic enthusiasm to Christian aspiration. Think of the religious creativity of the Jesuit missionaries who led Indians into the jungles of Paraguay to protect them from the traders who would have enslaved them. In the wilderness those same Jesuits used their own creative energies as well as those of their converts to build the wonder we now call the Reductions.

C. Intellectual Conversion Informs Affective, Moral, and Religious Conversion

The intellectual convert takes personal responsibility for the truth or falsity of his or her beliefs, for the adequacy or inadequacy of the frames of reference in which they are reached, and for the logical and methodological soundness of the operations the mind employs in trying to understand reality. Intellectual conversion informs the other kinds of personal conversion when it inspires them with speculative integrity.

As I have already indicated, late in my training as a Jesuit, toward the end of theology, I underwent an initial affective conversion which deepened as the mid-life crisis advanced. During that time a critical reading of contemporary personality theory helped me understand the way my own psyche works and has, I believe, helped minimize the emotional damage I might have otherwise done as a spiritual director. Similarly, Jesuits who attempt to keep up with the latest developments in moral theology show personal intellectual integrity in resolving their own consciences and in helping others to do so. In the realm of faith, I find a like integrity of mind in those priests and religious who come to our school in Berkeley for theological retooling (or "refooling," as one of them with wry critical humor recently described the process of theological updating).



D. Moral Conversion Helps Orient Affective, Intellectual, and Religious Conversion toward Realities and Values that Make Ultimate and Absolute Claims

A reality or value makes an ultimate claim on us if we must be willing not only to live but if necessary to die for it. A value or reality makes absolute claims on us when we need to affirm its ultimacy in all circumstances. The gospel of Jesus Christ and the realities it proclaims make just such a claim on us, as Christian martyrs past and present have testified by their blood.

When we make decisions in the light of such values, we advance beyond crudely pragmatic considerations to strictly moral thinking. But while the gospel lays stringent moral demands on the human conscience, it does not provide us with a ready answer for every ethical dilemma we face. In some moral decisions we need to use our noggins and reason our way prudentially to a responsible decision. Some ethical problems engage human affectivity. Think, for example, of sexual morality. Other moral dilemmas involve speculative choices. Think of the scientists currently involved in nuclear weapons research. Still other moral questions arise in religious contexts, questions for which the original revelation granted us offers no definitive answer. Consider the contemporary debate over the justice or injustice of excluding women from ordination.

The morally converted face all such questions honestly and attempt to resolve them prudentially. When that occurs, their moral conversion reacts upon the other three forms of personal conversion (whenever they are present) by orienting affective, intellectual, and even some facets of religious growth to rationally discriminated realities and values that make strictly ethical claims.

E. Religious Conversion Transvalues Affective, Intellectual, and Moral Conversion

1. Transvaluation Defined

The sensations, emotions, images, and concepts we use to respond to ourselves and our worlds endow human experience with value. Our mouths water at the prospect of a tasty meal. Joy, sympathy, love, fear, anger, hate -- emotions such as these perceive and judge the benign or threatening character of the persons and things we encounter. We daydream imaginatively

about things we hope to do. We wrestle conceptually with logical and moral conundrums.

We transvalue all such evaluative responses when having used them in one frame of reference we transfer them to another. When that happens they retain some of their original meaning but acquire new connotations in virtue of the novel frame of reference in which they are employed. A hearty meal shared with one's family on a home visit means one thing; the same meal would mean something else if taken alone in one of the *barrios* of Latin America. We respond emotionally in a different manner to abrasive people when we come to understand the history of suffering that motivates their quirkishness. The picture of a politician means one thing on a campaign poster and another when used on the face of a dartboard. After the first voyage of Columbus, the term "earth" took on new and exciting connotations in the minds of Europeans.

## 2. Natural Conversion Exemplified

As we have already seen, people can undergo affective, intellectual, and moral conversion naturally, that is, in complete abstraction from the historical self-revelation of God. Neurotic or psychotic anguish may reach such a pitch that those suffering it are forced to take responsibility for their emotional growth in a new and decisive way. The discovery of serious error in conventional ways of understanding or evaluating reality might lead an individual to assume personal responsibility for the truth and ethical probity of subsequent personal judgment and decisions without God, Christ, or any other faith-motivated consideration entering the picture.

The naturally converted grow in responsible ways. They cultivate healthy emotional attitudes, imaginative taste, and creativity. They search for truth systematically and honestly. They own up to their moral responsibilities to other persons. When in addition they experience religious and especially Christian conversion, their attitudes, hopes, beliefs, and moral values undergo a radical transvaluation.

## 3. Natural Conversion Transvalued

The commitment of faith introduces the religious convert into a novel frame of reference that transcends anything that natural converts experience, for it puts the convert into life-giving contact with an incarnate

God who enters history with the desire to communicate himself in gratuitous love to his creatures. In principle the naturally converted might even use the power of reason to conceive or even desire some such an encounter with God; but they can never experience it until God chooses to touch them personally. When that happens they need to put aside any personal preconceptions of what an encounter with the Holy might entail. Instead they must respond to God on the terms God himself sets. They need to believe.

Christian conversion transvalues natural affective conversion by transforming it into repentance before God and supernatural hope. We have discovered a twofold movement within affective conversion: (1) conscious healing confrontation with troublesome and largely unconscious negative feelings of anger, fear, guilt and (2) the subsequent liberation of the sympathetic emotions of love, compassion, hope. The second movement frees the human imagination both to dream of beautiful possibilities and to deal both creatively and realistically with the limitations of the human condition. Christian conversion demands that affective converts open their emotional monster closets in the presence of the God who in the mission of his Son and in the healing light of his Spirit has revealed to us a face of forgiveness and of judgment. Christian conversion thus transforms the first movement of affective conversion into repentance. Moreover, as the human imagination expands to the vision of a world recreated in the power of the risen Christ and in faith-filled submission to the moral demands of New Covenant living, Christian conversion transforms the second movement within affective conversion into the theological virtue of hope.

But Christian conversion does not claim only the hearts of converts; it claims their minds as well. It demands that the converts fix their beliefs about reality in the light of the truth of divine revelation. Christian conversion introduces responsible truth seekers into a confessing charismatic community of mutual service in which the communal sharing of the gifts of the Spirit creates a matrix of shared faith that nurtures individual believers to a true understanding of divine revelation. That revelation stands in judgment over any natural, rational conception of God because it tells us what God has to say about himself. That divine Word tests any humanly concocted conception of the deity.

Finally, Christian conversion claims not only the hearts and minds of the naturally converted but their consciences as well. The Christian

convert, as we have seen, moves from a repentant confrontation with disordered attitudes that prevent and contradict faith in a self-revealing God to heartfelt consent to the beauty of God revealed in Jesus and people who resemble him. That consent motivates obedient submission to the moral consequences of Christian discipleship. By teaching the natural conscience to judge right and wrong in the light of gospel values, Christian conversion transvalues natural moral conversion.

As we have seen, Jesus demanded of his disciples much more than the negative prohibitions of the Ten Commandments. He held up to them an ideal of covenanted communal living as children of God submissive to the Father in Jesus' own image and in the power of his Spirit. He required that his followers so trust the Father's providential care of them that they find in that trust freedom to share with others the material supports of life. He insisted that that sharing engage one personally and that his disciples welcome the poor and needy into their very homes. He condemned the amassing of wealth and all forms of human avarice. He demanded that his disciples place no condition in principle on their willingness to share. Instead they should imitate his own table fellowship with sinners by reaching across social barriers to the sinful, the marginal, the alienated and should measure their own generosity by need, not by merit alone. He taught them that their sharing should imitate the forgiving love of the Father and that their mutual forgiveness must test the authenticity of their prayer. The disciples of Jesus invoke his moral vision in forming their consciences. When they do so they transform moral conversion into Christian charity.

#### V. THE INTERPLAY OF PERSONAL AND POLITICAL CONVERSION

Through an examination of the moments and dynamics of conversion, we are attempting to show the moral insufficiency of personal conversion alone. We are attempting to prove that anyone who attempts to live a personally converted life without passing to socio-political conversion must inevitably succumb to some measure of irresponsibility in interpersonal dealings with others. As a strategy for proving our thesis, we are attempting to understand the ways in which the different kinds of conversion mutually condition one another. We have so far examined the dynamics of personal conversion,

for they provide an important key to understanding the dynamic interplay between personal and socio-political conversion. More specifically, an insight into the dynamics of personal conversion provides, as we shall see, important norms for naming and dealing with social injustice.

Once one concedes the real possibility of socio-political conversion, that concession forces one to try to understand how this fifth kind of conversion can introduce new complexities into converted living. I discover two dynamics that result from the interplay of personal and socio-political conversion. Let me once again first state them dogmatically and then try to illustrate them experientially. (1) The four forms of personal conversion authenticate socio-political conversion *by providing norms* for dealing with injustice. (2) Socio-political conversion authenticates the four forms of personal conversion *by deprivatizing* them.

#### A. The Four Forms of Personal Conversion Authenticate Socio-Political Conversion by Providing Norms for Dealing with Injustice

##### 1. The Need for Authentication

One form of conversion authenticates another when it enables the latter to develop responsibly. The personally converted decide to deal responsibly with personal decisions; but they can so focus on their own choices that they begin to ignore the motives and consequences of the choices of others that they might influence for better or for worse. The anonymity, impersonality, and intransigence of large impersonal institutions encourage such privatized personal behavior. Large institutions bewilder us by their complexity. They discourage us by their massiveness and inertia.

The politically converted know better than to retreat into the familiar comfort of privatized living. They know that individuals sin through omission who could act to influence the course of institutional development but fail to do so. The socio-political convert needs moreover to diagnose the causes of institutionalized injustice in order to deal with its consequences effectively. Some forms of institutional injustice express profoundly disordered emotional prejudices. Others disguise the evil they cause with obfuscating ideologies. Still other institutional injustices robe themselves in the pious garments of religious hypocrisy. Every form of institutional injustice cries out for moral analysis.

## 2. Affective Conversion Authenticates Socio-Political

Bigotry inspires some of the oppressive institutions in North America society. We live in a racist, sexist culture. Both racism and sexism spring deep-seated emotions, many of them largely unconscious. As institutionalized attitudes they incarnate and inculcate neurosis, even psychosis.

Racism and sexism both engage the archetypal imagination.<sup>9</sup> Archetypal images recur in different individuals, epochs, and cultures. They are charged with emotional power and tend to organize other images in the human imagination. Racism engages the archetype of the shadow; sexism, the archetype of the hero.

The shadow symbolizes the dark side of the human unconscious: repressed rage, fear, or guilt; feelings of frustration and inadequacy; regrets over the person one never became. When it surfaces in dreams, the shadow always possesses the same sex as the dreamer. Failure to deal with the shadow leads to shadow possession, as unconscious negative attitudes begin increasingly to dominate conscious behavior. In racists, shadow possession transforms the archetype of the shadow into a bigoted stereotype. Bigots with sadistic rigidity tend to project onto dark-skinned people the vicious attitudes seething in their own unconscious. And so in racist societies like our own, black people are stereotyped as vicious, lazy, sexually promiscuous, deceitful. As such bigoted attitudes take institutional shape black people are first ridiculed, then avoided, then segregated, then persecuted and discriminated against, and finally lynched.<sup>10</sup>

Sexism engages the hero archetype. The image of the hero interprets male coming of age. Typically, the hero is born in obscurity but is eventually called to perform some deed of derring-do. Often he must go on some quest, slay a dragon, rescue the maiden whom the dragon holds prisoner and return home in triumph to marry the maiden and live happily ever after. In heroic tales, only men dare and achieve. Women are cast in passive roles. They must first be rescued and then must admire and support the triumphant hero. Misogynism transforms the archetype of the hero into a sexist macho stereotype. And so in sexist societies like our own, women are either denigrated (*cherchez la femme*) or idealized out of competition with men in education, business, politics, and the professions.<sup>11</sup>

Affective conversion authenticates socio-political conversion by

raising to consciousness the emotional disorders that motivate institutionalized bigotry. It demands the renunciation of all such attitudes and the transformation of the institutions that breed them. It frees the imagination to envision a world purified of injustice and to strive to realize such a world.

### 3. Intellectual Conversion Authenticates Socio-Political

Intellectual conversion enables us to deal critically with conflicting ideologies. Ideologies popularize the pseudo-rationalization of unjust social arrangements. Ideologies of oppression fragment society in a variety of ways. Individualism exempts oppressors from social responsibility. Classism blames the poor for their poverty and thus excuses the rich from lifting a finger to help them. Racism and sexism assure bigots that blacks and women prefer oppression to freedom. Ideologies of exploitation rationalize using people ruthlessly for personal profit and power. Capitalism postures as the guardian of democratic freedom even as it concentrates virtually unlimited wealth in the hands of a few individuals. The myth of national security offers pseudo-justification for the ruthless defense of national business interests. Ideologies of forceful domination offer pseudo-justification for the unjust subjugation of whole peoples and nations. In the nineteenth century "manifest destiny" rationalized the conquest of native Americans. *Lebensraum* lent pseudo-respectability to Nazi military expansion. Reaganomics casts an obfuscating cloak over American neo-colonial exploitation of the Third World and over the alarming rise of militarism in American culture.

Intellectual conversion authenticates socio-political conversion by freeing the mind from the confusions of ideological doubletalk. It subjects the rhetoric of vested interests to probing analysis and unmasks its lies and fallacies. It frees the human intelligence to understand situations of injustice for what they are and to design and implement policies that lead to a just social order.

### 4. Moral Conversion Authenticates Socio-Political

Moral conversion supplies ethical criteria for measuring the justice or injustice of human social structures. It consecrates the conscience in public affairs to the pursuit of the common good, to the creation of

those conditions which will allow all to contribute to and share in the benefits of human society: physical survival, health, education, humane employment, a living wage, responsible freedom. The morally converted recognize that human institutions need to conform to the demands of legal, distributive, and commutative justice. In bringing such concerns to the regulation of political and economic conduct, moral conversion endows socio-political with ethical authenticity.

#### 5. Religious Conversion Authenticates Socio-Political

Religious conversion authenticates socio-political by denouncing prophetically pious rationalizations of institutional injustice. Religious people can conspire with institutional injustice in at least three ways. They may allow themselves and the rhetoric of faith to be coopted ideologically by the agents of oppression who seek to justify their exploitation of others. They may remain silent and passive before gross institutional injustice. Or they may sacrilegiously invoke the divine blessing on situations of oppression. Not only does Christian conversion demand the prophetic denunciation of all such pious hypocrisy, but it measures the justice or injustice of social situations by the extent to which they conform to the mind of Christ. From the standpoint of faith, a just social order conforms to the will of God. For Christians, that will has been definitively revealed to us in the ethics of discipleship which Jesus lived and proclaimed. In other words, Christian conversion transvalues the search for institutional justice by demanding that human institutions, like individual persons, incarnate the mind of Christ.

#### B. Socio-political Conversion Authenticates the Four Forms of Personal Conversion by Deprivatizing Them

Socio-political conversion deprivatizes personal conversion in two important ways. First of all, it demands that converts strive for authenticity in confrontation with The Others. Second, socio-political conversion culminates in commitment to one or more concrete social or political causes.



## 1. Encountering the Others

Individuals are through history and circumstance socialized into different groups: into different classes, sexual identities, political systems, cultural and racial identities, jobs, churches. The judgment of prejudice comes naturally and spontaneously to human minds. We generalize all too easily about the attitudes, beliefs, values, and life-style of groups to which we do not belong. Such generalizations frequently do no harm; but when sadistic bigotry hardens them into stereotypes, social generalizations begin to teem with violent possibilities. We confront the members of unfamiliar social groups as The Others.

Historically we humans have dealt with threats posed by The Others in a variety of ways. We have tried to denigrate, avoid, isolate, or eliminate The Others (as Hitler did to the Jews in Germany and as Americans have attempted to do to blacks and other races of color in this country). Or we have tried to assimilate The Others into familiar social roles (as WASP America did to European immigrants). Or we can accommodate to The Others and through a process of mutual adjustment work out a social arrangement mutually acceptable to both. The ecumenical movement applies such a strategy to Christian disunity. Finally, we can identify with The Others in their otherness, as liberation theologians demand that affluent Christians do with the poor. The ultimate goal of such identification, however, remains some form of mutual reconciliation in which the poor and marginal teach their oppressors the meaning of repentance and just living.

Those who eschew socio-political conversion rest content to live privatized lives insulated from all contact with The Others. They dwell complacently in the realm of the familiar and resist, sometimes aggressively, any attempt to break down the walls behind which the faceless threat of The Others looms. Socio-political conversion levels those walls and demands that converts search for authenticity in dialogue and empathy with alien, unfamiliar, and potentially threatening individuals and communities.

## 2. Commitment to a Cause

Practical commitment to social reconciliation also demands commitment to some concrete cause, for no other kind of cause exists. Moreover, potential socio-political converts only hover on the brink of initial conversion, without actually achieving converted authenticity, until they

stop merely talking about injustice and decide to *do* something about it. Practical opposition to massive institutional injustice, however, flounders ineffectually until like-minded individuals collaborate to eradicate specific injustices. Such collaboration consecrates one to a common cause.

Dedication to a cause intensifies and enhances the selflessness which personal moral conversion instills. Such dedication inspires solidarity with the marginal and oppressed. It frees one to deal with the Other as brothers and sisters, to identify with them in their suffering and to support them in their struggle for justice. It expands personal moral responsibility to include practical concern for the common good, for creating those conditions under which every individual can participate fully in and contribute to shared social benefits. Thus, socio-political conversion deprivatizes personal.

### 3. The Moral Necessity of Socio-Political Conversion

The preceding reflections point, I believe, to the moral inevitability of socio-political conversion. Without it the personally converted cannot act with full responsibility even in their interpersonal dealings with others. Personal conversion, as we have seen, attempts to motivate responsible personal choices, to foster healthy affective development, coherent and logical thinking, moral responsibility in personal dealings with others, religious faith. In a word, the personally converted ambitiously seek authentic personal self-understanding.

Nevertheless, the personally converted who fail to advance to socio-political conversion can never attain fully authentic personal self-understanding, for other forces than our own personal choices shape the way we perceive ourselves as persons. We American Jesuits cannot escape the human condition. We come to self-understanding through a process of socialization. Primary socialization occurs within the family; secondary socialization, in peer groups, schools, businesses, neighborhoods, cities, nation states, churches. We acquire a large part of our personal identity by learning to play different social roles. Inevitably, then, the large impersonal social structures that in important ways define human intercourse in our culture teach us for good or ill not only who we are but how we must behave towards others. I grew up a southern, white, Catholic, middle-class male. I did not set out to grow up racist, sexist, and middle-class, but

I did. Nor am I the only American to have done so. Capitalism, racism, sexism, classism, and the hypocritical religious rationalization of these and similar attitudes insinuate themselves into the personal attitudes, beliefs, life-style, and religious conduct of every American. Those who ignore that influence cultivate a form of self-deception that only socio-political conversion can cure.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, we fail to achieve full stature as persons until we commit ourselves to some socio-political cause. Like every other biologically based consciousness, human self-awareness suffers from spontaneous self-preoccupation. Children think with a thoroughgoing and innocent egocentrism; but when such self-preoccupation persists into adulthood it forfeits all claims to innocence. Adults should know better than to imagine themselves the center of the universe. Personal conversion partially attenuates human egocentric self-preoccupation, but only partially. By inculcating personally responsible behavior, personal conversion inspires a measure of self-transcendence, but because it focuses on the self it fails to inspire the special kind of personal self-transcendence that comes only with dedication to a cause. Causes make claims on us and demand of us a quality of self-sacrifice that relativizes personal growth needs. Dedication to a cause also consecrates us to the service of other people in ways that mere personal conversion does not. Within the trinity Father, Son, and Spirit give themselves to one another with a perfection of love that defines the very meaning of personal existence. When we humans give ourselves in love to one another through mutual dedication to a common just cause, we begin to experience with greater depth what creation in the image of a triune God means. Such dedication springs from a socio-political conversion informed by Christian love.

Moreover, without dedication to the cause of Christ we can never claim full conversion as Christians. That cause transvalues all others. Commitment to Jesus as Lord demands commitment to the Kingdom. Commitment to the Kingdom requires that we yearn that God's will be done on earth as in heaven. Because dedication to the reign of God makes absolute and ultimate demands on us, it relativizes any other socio-political cause. Their justice or injustice must be measured by their degree of conformity to the mind of Christ. The cause of Christ also encompasses every facet of human living, including economic and political life. For dedication to the Kingdom

consecrates us to the universal proclamation of the gospel. In our attempt to summon others to repentance and to authentic gospel living, we cannot exempt those in positions of authority whose decisions shape the institution that either nurture or destroy human life.

As Jesuits and priests we have special responsibilities in this matter. The ordained leaders of the Church must not only proclaim the gospel in the name and image of Jesus; they must also publicly represent the Christian community to the rest of the world. If as leaders of God's people we confront situations of oppression and injustice but refuse to denounce them, we conspire with them. Even if we merely hold our peace in the face of economic and political injustice, we sin through omission. The same responsibility to speak out constrains all Christians; but as spokesmen for the Christian community the ordained must show leadership in this matter. If we rest content to live and proclaim a privatized me-and-Jesus spirituality, we fall seriously short of one of our most sacred responsibilities as apostles and lead those we shepherd astray.

Similarly, a morally sound political conversion demands heartfelt dedication to the common good, to creating those conditions which will allow all to share justly in and contribute to the benefits of human society. Without dedication to the common good, no individual can live a fully responsible moral life or acknowledge the claims of legal, commutative, and distributive justice. Nor can anyone think clearly and truthfully who acquiesces in the obfuscating ideologies that blind us to gross violations of the common good. Emotional integrity too demands the willingness to deal with The Others, with those persons and movements in human society that threaten us by demanding that we expand our hearts to include them. Emotional integrity demands as well the willingness to face and deal with bigotry in ourselves and in others. Full moral, intellectual, and affective integrity comes, then, only with socio-political conversion.



#### 4. Practical Consequences

If, then, as Jesuits we fail to respond wholeheartedly to the challenge of the last three congregations, we fall short of our responsibilities as Christians and as apostolic men. Our dedication to the cause of the Kingdom must consecrate us to dealing systematically with the injustices that infect our world and our culture. An organization like Bread for the World suggests a simple but practical formula for a minimal form of socio-political involvement that goes beyond the responsible use of the ballot box. An ecumenical Christian lobby based in Washington, Bread for the World rallies support for legislation in congress to alleviate world hunger. It urges its members to study the causes of world hunger, to understand the moral and religious challenge it poses, and to learn practical strategies for dealing with it. It asks its members to integrate prayer into that study. It encourages them to engage in some form of political activism at least once a month, minimally by writing our political leaders in Washington in order to urge their support for significant pieces of anti-hunger legislation. I for one know of no Jesuit too busy to practice that minimal kind of social activism: prayer, self-education about some important economic and political issue, and practical collaboration on a regular basis in an effective lobby for economic and political justice. Some may feel called to more extensive kinds of social and political involvement; but until we Jesuits find time to make common just cause with others on some specific and important issue such as world hunger, disarmament, or bigotry, as Christians and as Jesuits we will have reason to question the integrity of our own conversion to God.

Only when we have educated ourselves to the social and political issues confronting the people of this nation can we begin to address them effectively in our own apostolates. Dictators understand well the political uses of education. They try to minimize its revolutionary potential and manipulate it to serve their own interests and that of the status quo. We run our schools, colleges, and universities for the sake of the Kingdom; and we have the capacity to use them to educate our students' consciences to judge the social, economic, and political structures of our society in the light of the gospel. In our retreat work we can use the Exercises to summon people not only to personal but to socio-political conversion as well. We can focus our scholarship on pressing issues like nuclear disarmament, world hunger, bigotry, and discrimination of all sorts. Our missionaries

can help educate us all to the plight of the developing nations. Jesuit activists working full time in the social apostolate can help their brothers in other areas of the apostolate contribute more effectively to the service of faith and justice.

But we will serve the cause of faith and justice effectively only if we are personally willing to undergo socio-political conversion. Faced with that challenge, let us not underestimate the inertia of our poor human egos. Conversion whether initial or ongoing always exacts a price: repentance and new commitment, the death and rebirth by which we enter into the paschal mystery. I find in myself an abiding reluctance to pay the price which socio-political conversion exacts. I suspect that I do not stand alone in this matter; but with the help of God and of my brothers I am learning, and here too I do not stand alone.

If as Jesuits we find strength in the Spirit to support one another as we walk the path of converted discipleship, we can also help one another more effectively to respond to the second great challenge posed by the Thirty-second General Congregation: growth in union of minds and hearts.<sup>13</sup> Such union can result only from our deepening, both personally and collectively, in an integral fivefold conversion. When communications do in fact break down in our communities, that fragmentation points to the absence of conversion among us at some level. The theology of conversion sketched in these pages can, then, expedite the diagnosis of why our communities sometimes fragment and waste their pastoral energies in internal squabbling. Sometimes divisions express unhealed emotional rigidity; sometimes, serious misunderstandings of the gospel and of the society in which we live. Divisions can arise from genuine conflicts of conscience or from reluctance to own our socio-political responsibilities. Insight into the modalities and dynamics of conversion can guide us as individuals and as communities toward that responsible personal freedom, passion for justice, and zeal for the gospel which alone will unite our hearts and minds in the common cause of striving with God's grace to establish his kingdom of justice and peace on earth as in heaven.





ENDNOTES

- 1 *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2; for a lucid analysis of the changes which Vatican II introduced into religious living see Richard Hill, S.J., "The Pastoral Guide to Canon Law: Religious," *Chicago Studies*, 15:2 (Fall, 1976), 316-329.
- 2 *Thirty-first General Congregation*, 204, 298, 569-579. In all references to the 31st and 32nd General Congregations, the numbers cited refer to the paragraph numbers in the margins of John W. Padberg, S.J. (ed.), *Documents of the 31st and 32nd General Congregations of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis, 1977).
- 3 *Thirty-second General Congregation*, 17, 19, 39, 69, 80, 84, 91, 97, 99, 109, 263, 265.
- 4 Jesuit Conference, *Documents of the 33rd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1984), 27, 33, 38, 48, 52.
- 5 This number of *Studies* suggests a broader theological approach to conversion than that suggested by Paul V. Robb, S.J., in his excellent essay "Conversion as a Human Experience," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, XIV, No. 3 (May, 1982). While I agree with the insights of Fr. Robb's essay, it focuses, as its author insists, primarily on the interplay between the religious and affective moments within the experience of conversion. In this essay I suggest that an adequate theology of conversion must attend to other moments within the conversion process as well and to the ways in which each kind of conversion conditions every other.
- 6 See Donald L. Gelpi, S.J., *Discerning the Spirit: Foundations and Futures of Religious Life* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1970).
- 7 See Donald L. Gelpi, S.J., *Charism and Sacrament: A Theology of Christian Conversion* (New York: Paulist, 1976), 27-61; *Experiencing God: A Theology of Human Emergence* (New York: Paulist, 1978), 259-323.
- 8 For an interesting anatomy of psychic disintegration, see Karl Menninger, Martin Mayman, and Paul Preuser, *The Vital Balance: The Life Process in Mental Health and Illness* (New York: Viking, 1963).
- 9 Different kinds of images function in an intuitive, affective perception of reality: (a) spontaneously remembered images, which resemble in some ways the afterimages that endure in the wake of a vivid sensation, (b) reconstructed remembered images (think of trying to remember where you put a lost set of car keys), (c) fantasies, or constructed images of unrealized possibilities, and (d) archetypal images. These latter images can be considered as a special kind of image because of the special way they function in human imaginative responses. Because archetypal images recur in different individuals, epochs, and cultures and because they illumine a variety of typical human affective responses, archetypal images put order into the otherwise kaleidoscopic instability and complexity of the human imagination. Although I do not endorse every aspect of Jungian archetypal theory, the fact that archetypal images recur has been in my own estimate documented not only by Jungian research but by

studies of mythology and comparative religion. In Jungian theory five archetypes play an especially important role in unconscious and conscious intuitive perceptions: the archetype of the male, the archetype of the female, the persona, the shadow, and the self. The archetype of the male is illustrated by hero myths which depict men in exploits of great courage and derring-do. The archetype of the female presents the feminine as the matrix of life and the transcendent source of intuitive wisdom. The persona symbolizes human social relationships and surfaces in dreams as symbolic dress: uniforms, clown suits, etc. The shadow is a dark figure of the same sex as the dreamer. It symbolizes dark aspects of the unconscious psyche which one fears facing consciously but which if faced bring healing. The self appears as a symbol of contextualizing wholeness, often as a God symbol. Since archetypal images interpret human emotions, they express both potentially destructive and potentially creative energies. The archetypal basis of many forms of social prejudice links the latter to profoundly disordered and often unconscious emotions that both buttress and feed upon bigoted and oppressive social structures. For a popular introduction to Jungian archetypal theory, see Carl G. Jung, et al., *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Dell, 1973).

- 10 See Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1958).
- 11 Gelpi, *The Divine Mother: A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984), 215-238; Helen Mayer Hacker, "Women as a Minority Group," in *Social Forces*, XXX (October, 1951), 60-69.
- 12 For a lucid introduction to the way in which institutions shape self-awareness, see Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1967).
- 13 Thirty-second General Congregation, especially 205-225.

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